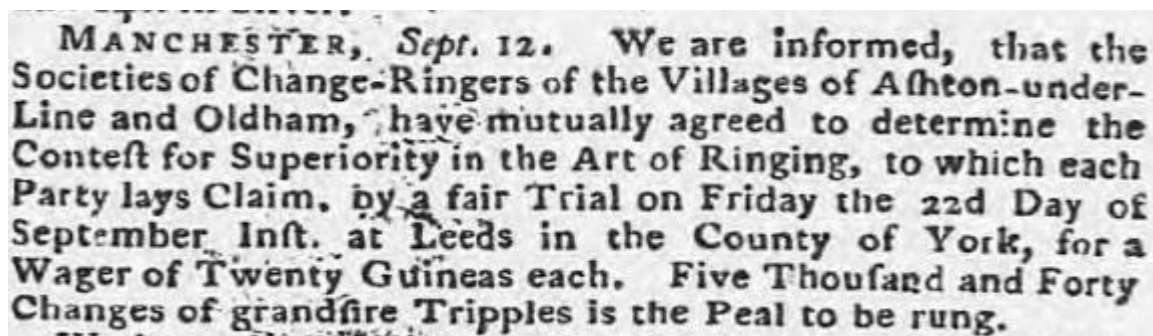


## A brief History of Striking Competitions

During the eighteenth century it was common practice for a local squire, churchwarden, or more usually a local inn-keeper in search of custom, to organise a publically advertised “match” where teams of ringers from different towers would compete for a prize of money or caps. The test pieces being rung would last about half an hour each in six bell competitions, so the match could take up a whole day. In eight bell competitions each test piece could last well over an hour. There was a considerable rivalry between bands of ringers from different villages, each looking to “out ring” the other, and to have their performance publicly judged to be the best. In towns this rivalry could become intense and law suits about the legality of the competition and outcome were not unknown.

It was not just the ringers that travelled to other towers for matches. Usually they would be accompanied by a large band of supporters – rather like today’s football match supporters, and there would be betting on the results of competitions. Bells and the ringers were very much a matter of local pride, and this was in the days when ringing was a secular activity. Feelings and support could get out of hand and at least one ringing match in the eighteenth century was prohibited by the local magistrates.



MANCHESTER, Sept. 12. We are informed, that the Societies of Change-Ringers of the Villages of Ashton-under-Lyme and Oldham, have mutually agreed to determine the Contest for Superiority in the Art of Ringing, to which each Party lays Claim, by a fair Trial on Friday the 22d Day of September Inst. at Leeds in the County of York, for a Wager of Twenty Guineas each. Five Thousand and Forty Changes of grandfire Tripples is the Peal to be rung.

### Press Cutting 1786 re the rivalry between the ringers of Ashton-under-Lyme and Oldham

The Victorians however thought that ringing matches were an abomination. In 1864 one writer stated that it was as bad as having a prize fight (boxing) in a belfry on a Sunday, and so the practice of ringing matches slowly disappeared as bells and ringers became more integrated into the life of the Victorian church. The attitude to ringing matches however took a long time to disappear and it wasn't until the 1960s that they resumed, although in a much quieter guise – and defiantly not competing for money or hats.

The first competition in the Oxford Diocesan Guild was probably held in 1960, with the first Witney and Woodstock Branch competition taking place in 1961. The first inter-branch competition was held at Radley in 1964. It was such a success that the ODG inter-branch competition continues to this day, as does the Witney & Woodstock inter-tower competition. Nowadays the primary reasons for organising striking competitions are to improve the standard of ringing, and to encourage socialising between towers, with cups, shields and certificates as prizes.